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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL OSCE TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: THE KURDISH DTP PARTY'S SQUANDERED

OPPORTUNITY

Classified By: Adana PO Eric Green, reasons 1.4(b),(d)

¶1. (U) This is a Consulate Adana cable.

¶2. (C) Summary: Despite having 20 of its representatives in parliament, the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) has entirely sidelined itself during Turkey's confrontation with Iraq over the terrorist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The DTP erred by refusing to distance itself sufficiently from the PKK and spurning opportunities to play a constructive role in parliament. It may well be that the DTP was unable to distance itself from the PKK precisely because the PKK pulls its strings. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), consumed with protecting its flank from nationalists and the military, has not explored ways to exploit the DTP's new national role to achieve progress on the political aspect of the Kurdish issue. As a consequence, when the PKK conflict hit the boiling point in mid-October, the DTP lacked the ability to play any meaningful role with either the PKK hostage situation or as a channel of communication with the KRG. As if wanting to further marginalize itself, a DTP conference in Diyarbakir in late October introduced constitutional proposals that will only engender further suspicion about the party's goals. The DTP's new leadership, to be elected on November 8, will likely wait for a long time before it sees a fresh opportunity to play a meaningful role in Turkish politics. End summary.

High Hopes Dashed

¶3. (C) When they entered parliament after the July general election, DTP deputies vowed they would avoid the amateurish grand-standing that led to the dismissal of Kurdish nationalists elected in the 1990s. At the level of symbolism and protocol, things went well: DTP leader Ahmet Turk publicly shook hands with (ultra-nationalist) MHP leader Devlet Bahceli and DTP representatives were welcomed at events by President Gul.

¶4. (C) Substantively, however, the DTP failed to enlarge the small political niche it occupied in July into a platform from which it could influence GOT policy on the Kurdish issue. Most importantly, the DTP failed to even try to exercise any moderating influence on the PKK, which has intensified its attacks on Turkish military and civilian targets, culminating in the deaths of over 40 people in

October. Secondly, when addressing the violence, DTP spokesmen appear more like apologists for the PKK than politicians fulfilling their democratic responsibilities. Underscoring how tone-deaf it is to Turkish political realities, a three-day DTP meeting in late October issued a communique whose first paragraph praised imprisoned PKK leader Ocalan's decisive role in achieving a "democratic solution" to the Kurdish problem while making no reference to the escalating crisis. The DTP's inability to establish an independent role reinforces the impression that its actions are largely dictated by the PKK, which appears interested only in throwing up roadblocks to addressing the Kurdish issue through parliamentary politics.

¶5. (C) PM Erdogan and the AKP have shown little interest in using the DTP's presence in parliament as an opening for exploring a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue. As the situation with the PKK heated up, Erdogan used it as a litmus test, making DTP condemnation of the PKK a pre-condition for dialogue with his government. The DTP predictably refused; this precluded any chance of the DTP occupying a position somewhere between PKK terrorism and democratic politics. Multiple DTP officials told us that if DTP MPs condemned the PKK, "their own constituents wouldn't allow them back in their districts."

¶6. (C) As a result, the AKP-DTP dialogue that had been expected following the election was stranded on the launch-pad. Siyar Ozsoy, an aide to Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir, noted that both the AKP and DTP bear responsibility for mismanaging their relationship during the first months of this parliament. Now, he said, the PKK and the Turkish military are directing the game and the civilian politicians

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have much less influence.

What Now for the DTP? A Long Wait in the Wilderness

¶7. (C) The DTP now appears to have little choice but to wait passively while the current PKK-Northern Iraq crisis unfolds and then wait) perhaps for years) for another political opening. Ozsoy noted that "when there is violence, the DTP has no role." He also said that Kurds are growing tired of the DTP's vague slogans calling for "peace and democracy." The party needs to develop more concrete proposals on cultural, socio-economic and political issues (and actually do something for its constituents).

¶8. (C) The recent DTP-organized Diyarbakir conference made some gestures in this direction, by advocating a new administrative structure for Turkey called "democratic autonomy," which would devolve substantial government authority to regional parliaments throughout the country. The communique also proposed that the constitutional amendment process now underway embrace an ethnically neutral concept of citizenship, instead of what they view as the current) in their view) Turco-centric formulation, and allow the use of other languages in education.

¶9. (C) Some mainstream politicians may sympathize with the goal of loosening Turkey's highly centralized system, and President Gul has talked eloquently about celebrating ethnic diversity. The DTP, however, by introducing these ideas in the midst of the most serious PKK-related crisis since the late 1990s, has made such constitutional innovations even less likely. The establishment now treats the DTP declarations as an intolerable provocation. CHP vice chairman Onur Oymen typified this stance, calling on the judiciary to close DTP, since "each sentence of that announcement was supporting terrorism and was in violation of the basic principles of the Constitution."

Leadership Transition Unlikely to Shift Policy

¶10. (C) The DTP is expected to name Firat Anli as its new party chair at the party's November 8 Ankara convention. Born in 1970 in Diyarbakir, Anli served as the Diyarbakir provincial chair of HADEP, the DTP's predecessor, and for four years as a vice president of the provincial bar association. In 2004, he was elected Mayor of the Yenisehir district of Diyarbakir (analogous to a borough president who reports to the mayor of the whole city).

¶11. (C) Sezgin Tanrikoglu, Anli's former boss at the bar association, told us that he is hard-working and progressive, but lacks the national experience of the current chairman, Turk. As with any DTP chairman, Tanrikoglu said, Anli's scope for action will be extremely limited by the prevailing political atmosphere and "external factors", i.e. the PKK. According to Seymus Diken, a journalist and media advisor to Baydemir, Turk's removal as chair results from DTP's disappointing showing in the election. It may also represent revenge by Tuncer Bakir, a former HADEP national chairman, whose team felt marginalized by the Turk leadership. Since Turk will remain leader of the DTP's parliamentary group, the party will have a two-headed (at least) structure, which is unlikely to result in the development of a more unified, coherent message.

Comment

¶12. (C) The marginalization of the DTP since the July elections has many causes, including poor internal leadership, PKK intransigence and the AKP's desire to avoid appearing cozy with Kurdish nationalists at a time of rising PKK violence. The result is that the GOT is now unable to exploit the DTP's presence in parliament as an additional conduit to the KRG authorities in Northern Iraq. The DTP is in dangerous territory. Some of the statements from its Diyarbakir conference - including referring to imprisoned PKK leader Ocalan as the leader of the Kurds - put it and the people it represents at risk. The more DTP is considered as

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a nuisance and less as a constructive tool, the greater the risk the party will be banned. In that case, one contact told us recently, only the PKK would rejoice in being able to tell Turkey's Kurds and the world that no peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem is possible.

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